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For Immediate Release

Pendleton County to be a pilot site for new Truancy Diversion Program created by the Kentucky Court of Justice

FRANKFORT, Ky., Feb. 22, 2006 — Phillip A. Sharp Middle School in Falmouth has been designated as a pilot site for a new Truancy Diversion Pilot Program, which will eventually be available statewide. The Kentucky Court of Justice has announced the creation of a Truancy Diversion Program for students at risk of being charged with a truancy offense and referred to District Court or Family Court.

"We are excited about the possibilities that this important program will help kids break the negative cycle of absenteeism," said Jeffrey Aulick, principal of Sharp Middle School.

"Truancy is a complicated issue," said Family Court Judge David E. Melcher, who will help oversee the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program in Pendleton County. "A strong relationship has been established between persistent absences and many social, legal and financial difficulties that manifest themselves in adult life. Our goal is to bring together educators, law enforcement agencies, courts, communities and families to try to reduce student absenteeism in its early stages."

Students who have missed the number of days allotted for a school period or who have too many unexcused absences are subject to being charged with a truancy offense, which could create a formal court record. Truancy is a status offense, which means it is an act that would not be criminal if committed by an adult.

The program uses a team approach to help students develop good attendance habits and improve their overall educational experience. The team is made up of judges, court designated workers, school counselors, principals, directors of pupil personnel and family resource staff.

The Court Designated Worker Program, under the direction of the Department of Juvenile Services of the Administrative Office of the Courts, will facilitate the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program. Court designated workers will hold weekly meetings with the

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parents and the student to review attendance records, behavior and grades, and develop a plan for success. Local judges will periodically attend meetings to reinforce the work of the truancy diversion team, and to offer encouragement and recognition to participating students who are making progress.

The Court Designated Worker Program was created in 1986 by legislation enacted by the Kentucky General Assembly, which provided for each of the state's 120 counties to have the services of a court designated worker. Court designated workers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to process complaints against individuals under the age of 18. The purpose of the Court Designated Worker Program is to serve the best interests of the child and to provide redress for offenses without court action and without the creation of a formal court record.

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